

Big openers on tap for Metro gridders

Written by Jim Ecker

Thursday, 28 August 2014 16:31 - Last Updated Friday, 29 August 2014 07:22

There was no grand design. Nobody sat down and tried to fill the opening night of the 2014 high school football season with intriguing matchups, but that's how it turned out.

No matter where you look, all of the eight Metro teams will have an interesting battle on their hands when they open the campaign Friday night.

You've got the ancient rivalry of Washington vs. Jefferson at Kingston Stadium, with the Warriors looking to build on last year's momentum and the improved J-Hawks looking to accomplish big things this year with newcomer Jesse Furrow at quarterback.

You've got Linn-Mar at Prairie, where the Lions are hoping to rebound from a couple of sub-par campaigns and the Hawks are looking to improve upon a .500 season behind 300-pound lineman Bryce Meeker, a future Iowa State Cyclone.

There's Kennedy at Iowa City West, where both teams have new head coaches who were promoted from within the program.

There's Marion at Mount Vernon, where the Indians will be tackling the start of a demanding schedule.

There's Cedar Valley Christian at Harmony, where the Huskies feel they have a legitimate shot at the first victory in program history.

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And we certainly have not forgotten Xavier against Dowling Catholic at Valley Stadium in West Des Moines. This is a rematch of the 2013 Class 4A state championship game, although the Saints are now in Class 3A with the new district alignment.

Here is a look at Friday's games:

XAVIER at DOWLING CATHOLIC

Valley Stadium, West Des Moines, 7:15 p.m.

Xavier is ranked No.1 in Class 3A and Dowling is ranked No.1 in Class 4A, according to the Des Moines Register, but it's really not a true rematch from the 2013 state finals when the Maroons dominated the Saints, 44-13.

Xavier is rebuilding with only four returning starters while Dowling appears to have simply reloaded behind all-star quarterback Ryan Boyle, who passed for 1,833 yards and 21 touchdowns last season and ran for another 1,332 yards.

Boyle, bound for the Iowa Hawkeyes next year, destroyed the Saints with his arm and legs last year in the UNI-Dome. The Saints graduated 10 of their 11 starters on defense and could have a hard time with Boyle again.

Xavier has a new starting quarterback with sophomore Bryce Schulte, who got his feet wet with the varsity last year as a freshman. Sophomore quarterbacks normally face a steep learning curve, but Schulte is not a normal sophomore.

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Schulte grew up with the Xavier playbook. His father, Duane, is Xavier's head coach. And his older brother, Reggie, was an all-state quarterback for the Saints in 2012. Schulte is a big quarterback at 6-foot-4 and has a chance to accomplish good things in his career.

JEFFERSON at WASHINGTON

Kingston Stadium, 7:15 p.m.

Reid Snitker got pressed into service as the starting quarterback for Washington last season and responded with a big year. He engineered an upset victory over top-ranked Xavier and led the Warriors on a six-game winning streak and into the Class 4A playoffs.

Snitker is primed for his senior campaign and has a pair of talented receivers in Landen Akers and Isaiah Nimmers and a college-bound blocker in future Cyclone Julian Good-Jones.

The J-Hawks have made big strides the past two years under Coach Brian Webb in terms of depth, size, speed and organization. They finished 1-8 both seasons, but an improved roster and a softer schedule could result in happier times on the southwest side of town.

Furrow has a powerful arm and quick feet at quarterback after moving here from Indiana. This will be his only season with the J-Hawks before joining a college football program somewhere next year.

The biggest challenge for Jefferson could be finding enough receivers to catch Furrow's passes, because he throws the ball with a lot of zip on it.

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LINN-MAR AT PRAIRIE

John Wall Field, 7:15 p.m.

Radio: KGYM 1600-AM, 107.5-FM

The big story at Linn-Mar this year could be the return of Perrion Scott, who is healthy and eligible for his senior campaign. Scott missed a good part of the 2013 season with a leg injury and missed the entire 2014 track season due to grades, but he's back in good graces and gives the Lions a major weapon on offense as a runner and receiver.

Linn-Mar has a college prospect at quarterback in 6-foot-4 senior Ryan Schmidt, and the combination of Scott and Schmidt could help the Lions put some points on the board. The big question could be the defense, which needs to improve after allowing 42 points per game in 2013.

The Prairie Hawks were on the verge of good things last year but had to settle for a .500 record after several near-misses and last-second defeats. Quarterback Trey Beckman is a savvy athlete with experience, and the Hawks have a premier lineman with Meeker at offensive tackle.

KENNEDY AT IOWA CITY WEST

Iowa City West H.S., 7:15 p.m.

Brian White earned high grades at Kennedy as its defensive coordinator in recent years. Now he's succeeded Tim Lewis as head coach and has scrapped

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Kennedy's power running game in favor of a balanced attack that will feature Sammy Lizarraga at quarterback.

The Cougars finished 8-4 last season and reached the third round of the Class 4A playoffs. Graduation thinned their ranks on the offensive and defensive lines, but the Cougars are optimistic about having another successful campaign.

Terrance Hall is a premier two-way performer at Kennedy as an all-state linebacker and running back. He played much of the 2013 season with a heavily protected broken arm, so it will be interesting to see what he can accomplish with two good arms.

Iowa City West also has a new head coach in Garrett Hartwig, who was promoted from the coaching staff into the top job this year.

MARION at MOUNT VERNON

Mount Vernon Middle School, 7:15 p.m.

Marion Coach Tony Perkins says the Indians are facing the toughest schedule he's ever had in 31 years of coaching. It begins with a non-district game against Mount Vernon, which has a new head coach with Lance Pedersen.

Marion needs to get off to a good start in the opener, because it won't get any easier from here.

CEDAR VALLEY CHRISTIAN at HARMONY

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Harmony High School, Farmington, 7 p.m.

Cedar Valley Christian has 20 guys on the team, the most in program history. Many of them have experience now, giving the Huskies a chance to break into the victory column this year behind quarterback Kenan Ulmer.

Harmony is starting over this year with its own team after having being part of a shared program with Central Lee in recent seasons. Cedar Valley Coach Ed Betsworth thinks his team can win a few games this year and this is one of them.